

# Gardening Newsletter

by Linda Gilkeson

February 6, 2018

## Big Chill Coming, Yams Again, Fruit Sources

**Well, nuts!** To prove my contention that you just can't trust February, the current forecast is for a few days of really cold air to hit this weekend. With lows of -4 and -5°C (25 to 23°F) predicted for the south coast (even for Victoria, which is unusual), you may need to take steps to protect some plants if that cold does materialize. I am afraid those temperatures will kill any early peach and cherry flowers that are opening now, but don't worry about garlic, spring bulbs, buds on native shrubs and trees or fruit trees that flower later -- they should be okay. Do worry about half-hardy herbs, such as rosemary, and new shoots of artichokes and other less robust perennials. Mulch right over the crowns of plants or cover them with plastic. It would be a good idea to cover spinach, lettuce, chard and other overwintered greens too; the roots should survive the low temperatures, but new leaves could be ruined as -5°C is pretty much the lower limit for many greens (kale would be fine, though). I plan to harvest as many leaves as possible before the cold snap in case it takes plants awhile to recover. Fluff up the mulch over carrots and other overwintering vegetables and pile mulch on top of cabbage heads to protect them. Also, a reminder not to harvest while leaves are still frozen (they thaw to mush). Wait until plants have thawed out in the garden, which can take up to a week for a frozen cabbage. If you have outdoor citrus trees with Christmas lights or heating cables to keep them from freezing, don't forget to plug them in again.

**More on growing sweet potatoes,** because I received a lot of questions after my last message. Yams and sweet potatoes are the same thing ("yam" is usually used for the dark orange tubers, but they are all actually sweet potatoes). A lot of grocery store sweet potatoes are the "Beauregard" variety which seems to do well enough here, especially when grown in dark-coloured containers. Set them where the sun can shine directly on the pot to keep the roots warm (black plastic 5-gallon pots work well). If you want to try growing other varieties, including some short season varieties for Canada, you can order started slips from Mapple Farm in New Brunswick: <http://mapplefarm.com/> Even if you don't want to order plants, see the last pages of their online catalogue for lots of information on how to grow sweet potatoes.

**Planting fruit this spring?** Fruit is a long-term investment so if you have a new garden this year, it might be best to use this season to plan, prepare the soil, get deer fences done and find out what varieties are available and decide what you want to grow. You could plant some things this fall and order the rest for spring 2019.

Many local nurseries carry berries and fruit trees in the spring and if they have the varieties you want and plants are good quality (i.e., buds on bare roots tree are not leafing out; container plants don't look like they have been in the pot too long) then you are all set. However, most nurseries don't have a lot of space for fruit so their selection is limited. In the Victoria area, here are two specialty fruit nurseries with extensive selections:

Fruit Trees and More: [www.fruittreesandmore.com](http://www.fruittreesandmore.com) [Bob and Verna Duncan, 724 Wain Road, North Saanich. [bvduncan@FruitTreesAndMore.com](mailto:bvduncan@FruitTreesAndMore.com) 250-656-4269]. Ask to get on their email list to receive information on their huge selection of fruit trees, figs, hardy citrus and many other plants.

Le Coteau Nursery, [www.lecoteau.com/](http://www.lecoteau.com/) [304 Walton Place, Victoria, BC V9E 2A4. [lecoteaunursery@gmail.com](mailto:lecoteaunursery@gmail.com) 250-658-5888]. They have a long list of bare-root trees available this spring and also carry multi-graft apples, pears and other fruit.

Meanwhile, for those with fruit trees, as I mentioned last month, it is time to get your pruning done—the sap is rising (woo-hoo!).

**Upcoming events:**

**February 17:** I will be giving a talk entitled “Of Cabbages and [January] Kings” at the Victoria Seedy Saturday: 12:00-1:00 pm. Learn how to grow cabbage and its diverse relatives really well, covering soil nutrients, irrigation requirements, timing of plantings, recommended varieties for all seasons and how to avoid damage from insects and diseases. For the schedule of all speakers and events, see:

<http://jamesbaymarket.com/SeedySaturday/>

**February 25, March 6 and March 10.** 9:30-1:30. I will be giving “Grow an Edible Garden” workshops sponsored by the CRD and held at the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific. The workshops are free and are intended for residents of the Capital Region that rely on Victoria and Sooke area reservoirs (the workshop includes water conserving information). These are introductory workshops on food gardening for beginning gardeners; we will cover soil fertility, bed design, irrigation options, when and what to plant for year round harvests. Pre-registration is required by calling: 250-474-9684.

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A brand new, expanded and updated edition of my gardening book, *Backyard Bounty: The Complete Guide to Year-Round Organic Gardening in the Pacific Northwest* is coming out in early March. Pre-orders before then will get a 20% discount from New Society Publishers. See:

<https://www.newsociety.com/Books/B/Backyard-Bounty-2nd-Edition> I will also have copies for sale at all my speaking events and workshops this year.